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The Black Cat

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A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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Vol. XVI., No. 4. Whole No., 184. JANUARY, 1911. 10 cents a copy $1.00 a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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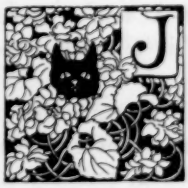
A Middle-Aged Romance.*

BY NEVIL G. HENSHAW.



JOHN CABELL BEVERLY was one of the lawyers of the old regime in the city of Richmond. He was a tall man of middle age, grave and courteous, and a confirmed bachelor. Indeed he seemed always to shrink from the pleasures and frivolities of the fairer sex, buttoning himself resolutely away both summer and winter in a long frock coat of severest cut, that was supposed to be impervious to the arrows of Cupid.

His practice was irreproachable. To him came only the people of his class — proud aristocrats, who placed their affairs in his hands with the absolute trust of a friend. When they were able, they paid him for his services. When they were not, he sometimes did the paying himself, masking the gift with technical terms and vague allusions to some ancient claim. Yet through it all he managed to live very comfortably in an old brick mansion on Gamble's Hill.

It was a quiet place — grave and dignified like its owner — the house set back primly at the end of a box-bordered walk that was flanked upon either side by an old-fashioned garden. Before it the green level sward of a little park stretched away to the edge

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of the hill from whose height one gazed far down upon the tumbled waters of the James.

Here Mr. Beverly dwelt alone, attended by a single, ancient darkey who combined the offices of cook, housemaid, and coachman, all in one. How he found time to attend to these manifold duties and yet to keep the big house in its invariable state of spotless order, is a mystery that must ever remain unsolved. But Uncle Lijah had been born into the family a slave and still called Mr. Beverly "Marse John," which, if you know of such matters, will go a long way toward enlightening you.

Promptly at eight-thirty upon the morning of each week-day, Uncle Lijah drove his master down town to his office in an old, closed carriage that might have been the great-grandfather of all coupés. At five o'clock he drove him back again. At six he served his dinner, going about the matter with as much ceremony as though the solitary meal had been a state banquet. At ten, in scornful disregard of the modern gas fixtures, he lit a candle and escorted his master to bed.

Such was the life of Mr. Beverly if the daily routine that I have described can be dignified by such a name. But even the most perfect of routines will sometimes slip a cog, and for no apparent reason.

One morning early in March, Mr. Beverly descended the steps of his home. The hour was eight-thirty and the ancient carriage stood at the curb with Uncle Lijah upon the box, his hands still damp from a hasty washing of the breakfast things.

Half way down the walk Mr. Beverly paused to pick a half opened jonquil — the first of the year. Slipping it through the lapel of his coat, he continued his journey to the curb.

"Lijah," said he, with his foot upon the carriage step, "I really believe that the spring is here."

Uncle Lijah viewed the jonquil with the distrust of one who gazes upon the establishing of a possible precedent.

"Weeds am weeds, an' salad am salad," he observed, irrelevantly. "Pears to me ef you wants a flowah you kin git one at de floris as we drives down town."

Seizing the pendent stem of the jonquil, Mr. Beverly settled it more firmly in place. Then he withdrew his foot hesitatingly

from the carriage step, replaced it, and withdrew it again.

"I don't think I'll drive down town this morning, Lijah," said he. "I have to get old Mrs. Warwick's signature to the renewal of her lease, and I can stop by there on my way to Main Street. Afterwards I'll take the car."

Had his master announced his intention of soaring from the hill top upon the breezes of the James, Uncle Lijah could not have been more surprised. Dropping the lines from his nerveless hands, he faced about, fairly bristling with indignation.

"De cyahs?" he gasped. "De cyahs?"

"It is a beautiful day," said Mr. Beverly, feebly, and, before his outraged servant could reply, he hurried off, for all the world like a disobedient schoolboy.

Upon reaching the foot of the hill he paused at the intersection of Cary Street. Here, upon the corner, rose the high brick front of the boarding-house of old Mrs. Warwick, scarred and weatherbeaten, yet still strangely reminiscent of its former grandeur.

Mounting the steps, Mr. Beverly was in the act of raising the huge brass knocker when the door burst suddenly open, and a vision stood before him.

It was not a girl, but a lady — a little lady, fragile and delicate, and really very pretty as little ladies go. Indeed, one could see at a glance that, at some former time, she had been possessed of almost a flower-like beauty. Now it was as though the flower had been pressed and laid away, to fade very slowly as the years passed on.

Blushing and confused she stood in the doorway, a bundle of school books scattering wildly from beneath her arm. Behind her old Mrs. Warwick called some parting injunction as to an early luncheon, the mad light of house-cleaning in her eyes.

Mr. Beverly gave one look and stooped to pick up the books. Perhaps in this position he exposed some vulnerable spot in the armor of his tightly buttoned coat, for the ever-watchful Cupid had reached his mark before even he straightened up again.

To the inevitable introduction that followed the return of the books, he paid but little heed. What mattered it that old Mrs.

Warwick, who abhorred the term boarder, begged leave to present her guest, Miss Carter?

He had found the true goddess of the spring that lies within each man's heart waiting to be awakened by the sunlight of a glance or a smile.

The affair was one of a moment. Acknowledging the lawyer's bow with a smile, Miss Carter once more tucked her books beneath her arm and tripped lightly down the steps. Mr. Beverly stared after her until she had rounded the corner, and then followed old Mrs. Warwick inside.

In the ensuing conversation he easily learned the history of his captor. Fifteen years before she had arrived, unheralded and unknown, at the then newly established house of Warwick. Her credentials had been the name of Carter and a life-long residence in the County of Patrick, and they had sufficed.

Her story was a simple one. She was an orphan, and before her arrival in the city she had supported herself by teaching a country school. She had boarded with distant cousins, themselves possessed of a school-teaching daughter. One day, upon a visit, the daughter had suddenly discovered that if she had Miss Carter's school, she could both teach and spend her leisure hours at home.

Result — a rupture of the none too pleasant relations between the cousins, followed by the inevitable departure of Miss Carter in search of fresh employment. Since then she had taught in the primary grade of one of the city's public schools.

For what followed these disclosures it would be best to think that Cupid is to blame, for Mr. Beverly came very near a deliberate untruth. But perhaps he had forgotten the lease in his pocket when he begged that he might secure it upon his arrival down town, and return with it at six o'clock — an hour at which even the most arduous of primary classes might well have finished its labors for the day.

Late that afternoon Mr. Beverly ascended the hill in the faint dusk of the spring twilight. On his lapel there glowed a fresh jonquil of palest orange, adding a final touch of jauntiness. For Mr. Beverly was jaunty. Lightly, easily, he stepped along, like one who treads on air. Wide he swung his cane, using it rather

as a plaything than an aid in propulsion, and, wonder of wonders, his tightly buttoned coat was now thrown wide, flapping gaily in the breeze.

Now you may be sure that none of these changes were lost upon his body servant when Mr. Beverly finally strode up his front walk, fairly scandalizing the prim, old-fashioned beds about him. Uncle Lijah had been married four times, and to him the wiles of Cupid were as so much crystal — clear and undistorting.

Yet it had been a secret wish of his that his master would fall in love, thereby striving as the last male Beverly to perpetuate his line. For years he had hoped for this only to at last despair. Now, in a moment, it had been done.

Still there was a cloud upon the horizon of Uncle Lijah's happiness. Would the one who had performed this miracle be worthy of its fulfillment?

That night, during dinner, his fears were set at rest. In England they have their heralds. In Virginia they still have their Uncle Lijahs.

"Lijah," said Mr. Beverly, as though voicing a passing thought, "what do you know of the Carters of Patrick County?"

The answer came with the promptness of one well versed in the mysteries of the twentieth cousin twice removed. Also it was accompanied by a sigh of the most profound satisfaction.

"She'll mos' likely be frum ole Marse Shelby Cyarter's branch," said Uncle Lijah. "Didn' she make no menshun of Strawberry Plains?"

Thoroughly disconcerted, yet feeling strangely pleased and boyish, Mr. Beverly cast all pretense to the winds.

"Her mother was born there," he replied.

"Yes, Sah," said Uncle Lijah. "'Twas what I lowed," and, retiring to the seclusion of the pantry, he very gravely poured a glass of his master's oldest port, and drank a silent toast.

The spring came on, crowning the city with a burst of verdant glory, and there was seldom an evening when Mr. Beverly did not call at the house of Warwick. In the still summer nights that followed he made many pilgrimages to the hill top with Miss Carter, while the boarders waited upon the steps for their re-

turn, searching their faces with feverish impatience for signs of the proposal that was so long delayed.

Then, one night in late July, it came.

That it was imminent the watchers knew before even Mr. Beverly had crossed the brightly illuminated patch beneath the arc light upon the square. There was a difference in his step, a tenseness in his bearing, evident to the most unobservant eye.

Miss Carter was conscious of it also as they climbed the hill in silence and paused at a bench upon the edge of the little park. The very scene itself seemed to have taken on a softer, gentler air, as though in appreciation of the occasion.

Below them the James murmured drowsily, gleaming like silver in its pools and shallows, ruffling in its rapids into faint, white bursts of fairy lace. Even the cruel rocks were softened to dim, gray blots in the sheen of the merciful moonlight.

Behind them the park lay hushed and still save for the whispering of the trees and the vague, insect noises of the night. The city seemed very remote and far away.

What Mr. Beverly said is no concern of ours, but you may rest assured that it was both straightforward and manly, touched with all the sincerity of a first proposal.

There was a long silence before Miss Carter answered him.

"I am sorry, my friend, more sorry than I can tell you," said she, at last, "but it cannot be."

"And is there — is there — another?" asked Mr. Beverly after a while.

"There was," answered Miss Carter, "and there still must be. If there was not I would know."

"And I," said Mr. Beverly, "do not understand."

Raising a hand, Miss Carter unclasped a slender chain that had lain hid beneath the gauzy fabric at her throat. Suspended from the chain was a small brown stone, rough and unpolished, yet rudely fashioned into the perfect semblance of the half of a Maltese cross.

"It is a fairy stone from my home in Patrick County. They are found nowhere else in the world, and the legend is that they are the tears of the fairies shed at the crucifixion of our Lord."

Mr. Beverly examined the stone carefully in the moonlight.

"And he gave it to you?" he asked, as he handed it back again.

"He did," answered Miss Carter, and told her simple tale.

"He was only a boy to whom I was engaged before I came to the city. His name was James Waters Bolling. As he was very poor, he went to a brother in the West to make his fortune. When he left we plighted our troth upon the fairy stone and then divided it. I have not heard from him since that day, fifteen years ago.

"He is dead," said Mr. Beverly. "He must be dead or he would have written in all that time."

Miss Carter shook her head.

"As I have said, I would know if he were," she replied. "We promised to arrange our affairs so that if one of us were to die before we were reunited, the token would go back to the living one. Only then would that one be free. I cannot understand it, but he is still alive. Of that I am sure."

"Then he has not kept faith," said Mr. Beverly, with conviction. "He has married and has forgotten you. And how could you know of this? How could you —"

He paused suddenly, aghast at the effect of his words.

Half risen from her seat, Miss Carter gazed at him, white faced and trembling. Her eyes were wide with fear and pain, and she caught her breath sharply in a little sob of horror.

"No! No!" she pleaded. "It could not be that. I have never even thought of it until now. I would know, believe me. My heart would tell me and I would die of shame. Ah! No! No! Do not let me think of such a thing. He is a Bolling and he knows of honor."

She paused for a moment to turn upon him again, her eyes ablaze with anger.

"It is unfair of you," she cried, fiercely. "It is cowardly. How can you speak so of one who is not here to defend himself? And I — I? Have you no thought for me? Do you think that I — a Carter — could wait these fifteen years for one whom I deemed unworthy? Would you first cheapen me and then ask me for my love?"

Shamed and abashed Mr. Beverly bowed his head before the storm and wished that a merciful Providence might have stricken

him dumb. Then he felt a timid touch upon his arm and, looking down at Miss Carter, he saw in her eyes the greater meaning of her despair. Saw it despite his ignorance in such affairs, knew it as truly as though she had shouted it to the world.

"My love, my love," said he, again and again, standing beside her with tight clenched hands, calling upon his honor to protect him in his hour of need.

"And is there nothing that can be done?" he asked, after a while.

"Nothing," said Miss Carter, and in her voice there was the weariness of a lifetime.

Long after they had returned that night the boarders sat upon the steps and wondered why, for Mr. Beverly had left the house as one bowed by years, tapping uncertainly upon the sidewalk with his cane.

Uncle Lijah knew also when, in the morning, his master walked out to the carriage, his coat tightly buttoned as in days of yore.

But if upon this particular occasion the old darkey alighted from his box to help his master inside, it is not to be imagined that he connected the stooping figure with any thought of approaching age. Such a thing would have been belied by his firm, sympathetic grasp upon his master's arm.

And when Mr. Beverly slipped down the arm until his hand lay enfolded in the wrinkled black palm, the clasp that followed might well have occurred in those days when the master was a boy, and the servant was a slave.

Arriving at his office, Mr. Beverly's one desire was to hide the evidences of his distress from a too observant world. Accordingly, when he entered his private room and found his office boy engaged in sorting the morning mail, he embarked at once upon the matter in mind.

"Jimmy," said he, "I am going to be very busy all morning and I do not wish to be disturbed. You can have a holiday until twelve o'clock, when I want you to take these papers down town. Be sure to return at that hour as the gentleman will be expecting them. Have you a watch?"

Jimmy, a newly engaged lad of thirteen, deposited the papers

where he could find them easily upon his return. Next he thrust a hand into the pocket of his coat and drew forth a huge silver watch, which he laid upon his open palm.

"Let's see if we're together, sir?" he suggested in a voice of pride.

Half amused, Mr. Beverly produced his own timepiece and noted the hour. Then he gazed at the object of Jimmy's pride and his eyes grew wide and staring. For, dangling from the watch as a charm, was a small brown stone, rough and unpolished, yet rudely fashioned into the perfect semblance of the half of a Maltese cross.

A long minute passed while Mr. Beverly gazed, his own watch slipping from his trembling hand to swing like a pendulum at the end of its anchoring chain.

"Where — where — did you get that charm?" he asked, at length in faltering tones.

"It was my father's before he died," replied Jimmy, promptly. "It's what they call a fairy stone and it comes from — "

"Yes, I know, Jimmy," interrupted Mr. Beverly in a dull voice. And your full name, I suppose, is James Waters Bolling?"

It was now Jimmy's turn to stare.

"Why yes, sir," he cried. "How did you know?"

Mr. Beverly ignored the question.

"Now that I think of it, you can have the whole day," said he. "I'll take the papers myself."

Long after Jimmy had gone the lawyer sat at his table lost in unhappy reflection. Twelve o'clock came and the papers lay forgotten upon their shelf while he fought out the struggle with himself.

So the lover had been untrue — had married within the first year of his departure as the age of Jimmy testified. Surely he could have given no thought to the woman he had left behind — to the woman who had waited so bravely, so patiently, trusting him always through the silence of the years.

Now she was free. Free to marry him, to make their two lives one. But was he free to tell her of it?

Clearly and with pitiful plainness he could see her look when

he had suggested this very thing the night before. Once more he could read the shame, the horror, in her eyes.

"Ah! No! No!" she had cried. "It could not be that. My heart would tell me and I would die of shame."

And now, as she had said, could he cheapen her and then ask her for her love?

Yet it was the only way. Well he knew that through all the years of her life she would wait for the faithless one. Well he knew that her love for him could never for a moment make her forget that she held in her hands the honor of the Carters. And did he not hold in his hands the honor of the Beverlys?

The sun swung low in the western sky, playing strange pranks in the dark corners of the room, yet Mr. Beverly sat on, fighting the grim battle with his love. And when at six o'clock Uncle Lijah, grown tired of waiting, burst unceremoniously into the room, he found his master white with pain, yet smiling withal in the consciousness of his victory.

"Thank God that I was born a gentleman, Lijah," said he, and went out to his carriage with the faltering step of a broken man.

That night Mr. Beverly walked with Miss Carter to the hill top and gazed out upon the James in tortured silence while she laid the simple plans for their future.

They were to wait as she had waited — the two of them now instead of the one. In the waiting they were to be friends, good friends, but nothing more. If the lover were dead, then some day the token would be returned. If he were not, they were to forget — if they could.

Thus was the agreement made and in the years that followed Mr. Beverly kept it well. If on the following morning he went upon a journey it was not through any faltering of his purpose but rather through the blackness of his despair.

If also he dismissed the unconscious Jimmy with a full quarter's wages and the best of recommendations, we cannot blame him. Truly are the ghosts of our thoughts sufficient unto us, without having them reproduced in the more substantial form of flesh and blood.

His journey over, Mr. Beverly returned as best he could to

the neglected ruts of his former routine, allowing himself but a weekly call at the house of Warwick.

Once each spring he took his courage in his two good hands and asked Miss Carter if she had had any word from the West. Once each spring she answered that she had not, after which the two would part in silence, tortured by the thoughts of what might have been.

Thus passed five years, carving the lines ever deeper in Mr. Beverly's care-worn face. Thus did Miss Carter begin to lose her little ladyhood, fading very swiftly as the months passed on.

It was in the winter of the fifth year that Mr. Beverly lost his one source of sympathy.

I will not say that Uncle Lijah died, for, perhaps, through some vague remembrance of his slavery, he might have looked upon such a performance as almost a breach of faith. Rather would I think that in awaiting the desires of his master he received a command from the great Master of us all and obeyed it blindly, as we all must do, his true old heart throbbing to its final beat with the knowledge of his trust.

Never had Mr. Beverly said aught to him of his sorrow save the simple things that I have set forth, but there had been an understanding between them that had needed no spoken word. In every look, in every gesture, in a thousand different acts of love and kindness had Uncle Lijah shown his silent sympathy, and Mr. Beverly had seen them all and had understood.

He found the old darkey one bitter night of snow and sleet sleeping quite peacefully, the bedroom candle in his hand, and on the instant he knew that the fight was lost and that there was nothing in honor save retreat.

"Lijah, Lijah, old friend, I cannot go on alone," said he. "God help me, for I have fought a good fight and I have kept the faith."

Yet he stayed on through the winter, arranging his affairs, his routine hopelessly broken, his life a chaos at the hands of strangers.

It was upon an afternoon early in March that he journeyed with Miss Carter to the hill top for the last time. As upon the day when he had first met her, the air was touched with a faint

promise of the approaching spring. The James murmured softly below them whispering of life and greenness, and the little park seemed to stir uneasily at the touch of the strong, clear sunlight.

But how can such tokens prevail when in the heart it is still winter?

"And you will leave to-morrow?" she asked, hopelessly for the hundredth time.

"To-morrow," he answered, bravely. "It had always been my desire to study the ancient English laws and where better than in the land of their making? I had not thought to retire so early but — it is better so."

"Yes," said she, "it is. My honor is very dear to me and I have often been afraid. But if ever — Ah! if ever — "

She paused at the thought, her eyes glowing with hope and expectation.

"It is all that I shall live for," answered Mr. Beverly, softly, but in his eyes there was no answering glow.

"And your home?" she asked, as they passed it in their descent of the hill.

"It will be sold," he answered. "Not at once, for I have not found a proper purchaser. To-night I will prepare a deed in blank to leave behind. When I sign it in the morning, I will have severed the final tie."

That he spoke the truth was soon proven, for at the house of Warwick he told Miss Carter good-bye. And though it damage my romance, I must say in the interests of truth that there was little of love's tragedy in their parting.

At the door step Mr. Beverly bowed low over Miss Carter's outstretched hand.

"I shall be waiting — always," he said.

"Dear heart," said she, for the first and only time, and turned away to hide her tears from the passers-by.

That night Mr. Beverly prepared his deed, phrasing it carefully with his usual attention to details. The following morning he laid it upon his library table and sat himself down in the dismantled room to await the arrival of a brother lawyer.

Never before had he felt so hopeless and deserted. It was as

though, already dead in all save name, he was forced to sit in wretched, living contemplation of the wreck of his life.

The lawyer arrived promptly at ten, accompanied by a fresh-looking youth of eighteen. He was introduced as Mr. Bolling, a student in the lawyer's office, who had come to act as the second witness. That Mr. Beverly recognized in him the former Jimmy, scarce added a drop to his already overflowing cup of bitterness.

The terms of the sale being agreed upon, Mr. Beverly signed the deed and the witnesses followed. The affair was brief and business-like with never a hint of approaching drama.

Slowly, methodically, Mr. Beverly took up the paper to see for the last time that all was right. Then he turned to one of the witnesses, a trace of annoyance in his air.

"Your pardon, Jimmy," said he, "but your signature is incomplete. You have omitted the Junior from your name."

The youth looked surprised.

"Why there isn't a Junior," said he. "I was named for an uncle. I —"

But Mr. Beverly interrupted him with a shout, the paper fluttering in his outstretched hand.

"An unmarried uncle, Jimmy?" he cried.

"Yes," began Jimmy. "He came to us out West the very day I was born, and they thought —"

Then he paused to stare at the strange performance of a staid, prematurely aged lawyer who tore a newly executed deed to fragments and shouted with hysterical relief.

It took Mr. Beverly some time to convince his companions that he had not gone suddenly insane, and it took still longer for the bewildered Jimmy to explain the mystery of the fairy stone.

Vaguely, confusedly, he told of the young uncle who had fared forth to his minor brother in the West, only to be killed the day after his arrival by a falling stone. Thus he had died, leaving little of value save the watch with its accompanying token of the promise that he had been unable to fulfill. At the father's death the watch had gone to Jimmy, and had been presented to him by his mother soon after their return to their native state.

If in exchange for the fairy stone Mr. Beverly promised Jimmy a full partnership when he should have finished his study of

the law, we need not be surprised. There is no real value to anything save the esteem in which we hold it.

Nevertheless when the fortunate youth had finally departed with his astounded instructor, I fear that he placed but little value upon the promise, for he felt assured that it had been given by a madman.

Five minutes later Mr. Beverly closed the door of his house behind him. His step was light, his face was gay, and his coat stood widely open to the breezes of the morning.

Half way down the walk he paused to pluck a half-opened jonquil — the first of the year. Carefully he drew it through the lapel of his coat, settling it into place with a soft, caressing touch of his fingers.

"Weeds am weeds, an' salad am salad," said he, in a voice of tender reminiscence.

For a while he stood motionless, gazing out toward the curb with eyes that seemed to hold some pleasant vision.

Perhaps he saw the kind old darkey's face, gazing down at him now in solemn disapproval from the box of his ancient carriage. Perhaps he saw only the deserted street, the budding trees, and the pale spring green of the little park.

At all events he was smiling contentedly, like one who has greeted an old and trusted friend, when he finally set forth in search of Miss Carter.

Between Themselves.*

BY ALFRED E. BENNETT.

HE Trans-Pacific mail liner *Mongolia* lay for two days in mid-ocean, helpless, from an accident in her fire rooms, and then proceeded on her way. The following are fragments of an exhaustive and carefully written account of the accident in the ship's log:

"At 11 o'clock, post meridian, July 20, 19—; Longitude 136 degrees 32″ W.; Latitude 3 degrees N., a quantity of escaping oil in the forward fire-room caught fire. When the firemen rushed on deck some one gave the fire alarm. In spite of the efforts of officers and crew a panic ensued among the passengers. Second cutter was cast adrift, presumably by two steerage passengers that are missing. Hon. James Wellden, Barrister, London, first cabin, missing. . . . Supposed to have fallen overboard during the excitement."

When morning broke on the drifting cutter her occupants studied each other curiously. The English jurist remembered the giant Slav and the big, coarse Italian. He had seen them often among the other steerage passengers around the break of the forecastle when he took his daily promenade. The Slav and the Italian turned to each other, knowingly. This was the little man with the side-whiskers that had nodded approvingly when the mate kicked and swore at a steerage passenger for failing to observe the sign:

"STEERAGE PASSENGERS NOT ALLOWED ABAFT THIS NOTICE."

And it was quite natural that this superior person should even now be in the after part of the boat while they found themselves

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forward. There was no attempt at conversation. By the frightened cries that had followed their separation from the liner the men learned that they all spoke a different language. The sea was smooth as glass, and there was nothing to be seen but the eternal sun and the sky's colorless ring.

It was about the middle of the forenoon when the Slav licked his dry lips, swallowed hard several times, and leaned toward the water-beaker and box of sea-stores that lay in the bottom of the boat. But the Italian moved at the same time and the two men looked at each other. From the big, watery, pale-blue eyes, and the dull, ox-like orbs there flashed a light that might blaze between a determined hyena and a stubborn jackal over the body of a lamb, or a lone watering place in the desert. Then, they turned to the white-haired jurist, who sat strangely still.

The men were hungry and thirsty. The aged Englishman was even faint. And food and drink — there were the boat-box and water-beaker that are kept in all the boats of an ocean-going vessel.

Again the two men forward gazed long at the precious provisions and then at the old man.

"He did not pull an oar; he is useless." With this thought they both moved; their shoulders touched, and they thrilled at the contact — the knowledge of comradeship. Here was unity of purpose. They were brothers.

Not a quiver of this sinister pantomime had escaped the Englishman. He felt a great wave of self-pity. He realized that he had been condemned by the highest tribunal — a majority of the People — and that there was no appeal. His vote was the minority.

Grasping at a last straw, his judicial mind thought of mixing religion with politics — it had been done to advantage — so keeping his eyes steadily on the now on-coming Italian, he made the sign of the Cross on his forehead and breast. But the black-browed man did not pause. He climbed over the last thwart. There would be plenty of time for the Cross. It would serve when the water and food were gone.

Slowly edging back until he crouched upon the gunwale by the idly swinging tiller, the condemned man watched his execution-

ers advance. Bending low, shoulders together, hands claw-like, the twin beasts crept relentlessly on.

When they put their feet together on the coxswain's seat, the man on the gunwale lifted his face once to permitting Heaven, and then, with the calmness and deliberation of one getting into bed, let himself over the stern into the sea.

Straightening up, the Italian drew back the corners of his long mouth, showing two rows of ivory, sharp as a dog's and white as milk. The Slav answered his brother by lifting a thick lip from dirty, irregular teeth, after the manner of a caged jaguar that places his paw on a hunk of bloody meat. Neither man could wipe away the smile. The Italian's face stiffened like a ghastly mask and the Slav, try as he might, could not bring the upper lip back over his teeth.

They sank down on the after-thwart, back to back, and sat long in deadly silence. Suddenly, the same thought came to both. Whirling, lightning-like, they recoiled for an instant at the ghoulish grins, and — flew at each other's throats.

Long into the night they fought. Perfectly matched, neither could gain an advantage, and rolling in the bottom of the boat they struggled with all the desperation of strong animals looking death in the face. There were no pleas for mercy or a truce; no word, curse or cry was uttered. Once they got throat grips and choked each other into insensibility, but they opened their eyes together and fought again. Utterly exhausted, they lay at times with their arms twined like affectionate brothers. The fearful struggle continued throughout the night and both men were half dead from hunger and exertion. Tortured with a terrible thirst, they lay with their heads against the water-beaker and listened to the gurgle of the precious fluid as the boat rocked with their efforts.

At daylight, the Slav sought to touch the cask, suggestively, hoping that the Italian would understand to declare a truce until they might both drink, but the other, catching the Slav off his guard, seized the hand and buried his teeth in the wrist. That settled the water problem. Both knew that they could not drink together, and further, that whichever drank first would have the other at his mercy. So they renewed their struggles,

and the water sloshed merrily in the beaker.

On the fourth day the Italian turned to the Cross. He tried to whisper an *Ave,* but not a sound could he wring from his swollen throat. Then, with his last ounce of strength, he raised his arm to make a sign of the Cross. But the Slav, through his fast-glazing eyes, saw the opening, and seizing the hand, bit it savagely.

A few hours later the Italian died, and the soul of the Slav sank down with the other.

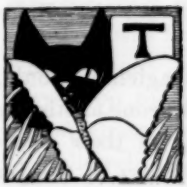
The big liner *Empress* sighted the *Mongolia's* derelict cutter a week after the accident. She had the story by wireless and her officers knew the drifting boat at once. When the mate and his boat's crew boarded the lonely craft, they looked first at the water-beaker. It was full. Tearing open the provision box they found it to be intact. Then, a startled cry from a seaman drew all hands to the stern-sheets. The trunk of a man whose hands had fastened in a death grip on the rudder-cords floated behind. Sharks had eaten away the legs. Lifting the body on board, they found under the garment an emergency belt holding concentrated food and a gallon of fresh water.

The captain was waiting when the mate returned to the *Empress.* Touching his cap, the officer made his report in the voice of the men who are never surprised:

"Three men dead, sir, with enough food and water to have lasted them a month."

The Butterfly Links.*

BY R. C. KENAMORE.



THIS story is told for the purpose of preserving the fame of William Emory Hallowell, the man who made golf possible in Guam. I have related the incidents to a few of my friends since I returned to the States, and they have seen fit to look upon the recital with some incredulity, but I have resolved to write the story that this valuable citizen may have his due, and doubters may go hang.

Golf took like anything in Guam when the first sticks and balls were first brought in, some eight years ago, and we who were marooned there set about providing a suitable course. This was soon found and put in shape, and we went at the game with vim. It is pretty dull in mid-Pacific with nothing to do but wonder when one will be transferred.

But as soon as everything began to shape up nicely, troubles began to spring up like the rank vegetation of that prolific island. Indeed, the vegetation was the greatest bother. If we had put enough men at work on the eighteen-hole course to keep it clear, we would have bankrupted the Insular government. It would have required a small army all the time.

The grass grew so fast that a closely cropped green would cover a ball the second day, and we lost so many balls that we exhausted the visible supply, which was not large to start with. Closely as our keen-eyed native caddies would watch, we would lose balls, and besides delaying the game, it was expensive.

Hallowell was connected with the Department of Agriculture of the United States government and he knew a lot of things. One day as I left the links, I saw him in a little shelter house where we hung our coats. He did not notice me, but I noticed him and saw the light of genius in his eye. Next day he came

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swinging across the grass, making commotions in the swarms of butterflies and seeming very joyful.

He came to the first tee and called us all about him. Then he made a little flamboyant speech, calling himself the Deliverer of Guam and telling us where he wished his monument erected when he had been called from us. I was glad afterward that we cheered him very generously, though we had not the slightest idea of what he was talking about.

"Observe closely," he commanded as a magician would. Then he drew a golf ball from one pocket, and from another a small jar with a screw top, such as ladies keep on their dressing-tables. He rubbed some of the jelly-like contents of the jar on the ball, teed it up and drove off.

Casually noting the direction, he turned to us as an orator.

"My dear friends, you will now kindly follow me. I lead you to your deliverance." He strode off through the ankle-deep grass swinging his club as gaily as a fairy would a wand. A hundred yards away was a cloud of blue butterflies, apparently swarming over some object on the ground. He walked into the fluttery mass, brushed aside the grass, and there was his ball.

We cheered in good fashion then, for we saw the hall-mark of inspiration. We knew that he had forever eliminated the lost-ball trouble if he could make the butterflies follow the ball, for there are more butterflies than anything else in Guam.

Then William Emory consented to explain. He had carefully examined into the habits of the large, swift, blue butterflies, and had learned that they fed exclusively upon the honey in a little brown flower that we came later to call the Foozler's lily. Then it was simple. He employed some natives to bring him a quantity of this plant and extracted the honey in some way of his own. This, made into a sort of paste, was the stuff he rubbed on the ball. Its strong and rather pleasant odor attracted the butterflies and all in the vicinity flew to the ball when it stopped, setting a waving flag, as it were, on the ball's lie.

Hallowell was a hero for days, and we gave him a very successful supper in the commandant's quarters. He went stolidly ahead with his work, but found time to analyze the honey and compound a satisfactory substitute which could be made by

a chemist, thus eliminating the native flower gatherer nuisance.

We named the course the Butterfly Links in his honor, and the wife of a consular agent created a decided stir at a lawn party one afternoon by putting some of the honey on the top of her hat. She moved about the grounds with an aurora of blue butterflies above her. It happened by the merest chance, that blue was the color most becoming to her.

But it was two years before the accomplishment was announced which finally assured Hallowell of immortality. We usually played up to the very moment of nightfall, and night falls in Guam almost with the suddenness of a curtain in a theatre.

Hallowell asked us all, there was such a pitifully small colony at best, to stay until dark. We did, expecting new wonders. We asked if he had discovered the favorite tipple of the fireflies, and similar silly questions, but he maintained a becoming reserve.

When darkness had come, he had a lantern swung on the first flag and went to the tee, even as he had done two years before. He smeared some paste on his ball and drove off, as he had done two years before, but we refused to be impressed, as we saw that every day.

We looked toward the lantern and were positively dumfounded to see a great commotion among the fireflies. We ran to the little luminous cloud not far from the flag, for Hallowell played a creditable game, and his ball was there.

Some one caught one of the fireflies and the secret was out. That wonderful man had actually succeeded in crossing the fireflies and the butterflies in such manner that they kept their taste for the honey and their light, too.

After that we spent our evenings in playing golf and telling Hallowell what a great man he was.

The Doom of Ravenswood.*

BY ARCHIBALD RUTLEDGE.

TOOK the longer and more unfrequented of the two roads because the ride home, to Ravenswood Plantation, through the late summer afternoon, was delightful. Never had the woods seemed so friendly, the flowers so bright, the birds so songful. At one place the road dipped into a cool hollow, where a slow stream ran, and the underbrush rioted densely. The swamp, I knew, went by the fanciful name of the Doom of Ravenswood; though I confess that it never impressed me with any sense of impending disaster. It seemed a place full of ancient solitude, a haunt of ancient peace.

The wild blue flags were so beautiful, growing there just beyond the little white sandbar in the swampy stream, that I let the lines fall on Redbird's neck, and dismounted. He immediately took advantage of my apparent aberration, and began to graze on the rank and luscious grass that lined the shadowy road.

I walked out on the tiny peninsula, bending under the feathery willow boughs; and reaching down I grasped the stem of a royal flag-flower. It broke at the joint, and slid out of its tight socket easily, a silver moisture dewing its stalk. I took a step farther, toward another beauty that reared its purple head just beyond my reach. I leaned far out, and my feet sank in the sweating sands; I grasped a willow limb and bent forward. Though I could feel that my feet were almost soaked through, I had made up my mind to capture that flower at all hazards. Another step I ventured; and now I was on the verge of where the black waters of the morass lipped sluggishly the shining sands of the shore. The flag was easily within reach; strangely enough, it seemed to come nearer to me. I released the bough, which sprang back into its place. I grasped the luring flower, and as I tugged gently at it,

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I felt myself sink. To my amazement I was over my ankles in the sucking sand. But I nevertheless pulled the flag; then I sought to withdraw one foot. I felt the other give way; I struggled, I floundered, I sank up to my knees. Then, trembling, I stood still, — if, indeed, I might call it standing, — for the black water had begun to bubble thickly about my legs, and they, like dead weights, sank slowly downward.

I tossed the flowers far up on the shore, noticing at the same time that my tracks had been obliterated by the watery, treacherous sand. Very gently, then, I pulled off my coat and laid it on the edge of the bog. If I could get my feet on it, or my knees, it might give me support until I could spring to firm ground. I put my hands on the coat, lightening the weight on my legs; but the attempt was disastrous. Swiftly and ruthlessly the whole bottom seemed to give way under my feet, and I was drawn by the monster down, down, down!

A cry and then a groan of mortal fear and agony escaped my lips; and Redbird, feeding near, threw up his head and looked at me strangely. I do not doubt that I returned his look in a way that justified his alarm. He looked startled and dishevelled; for his mane was over on the wrong side and the reins had slipped over his head and were dangling. But after a moment's gaze, he decided, evidently, that while I was acting as I should not, it was my own affair; so he buried his nose again in the fragrant grass, but kept one eye cocked with an air of not wishing to miss anything.

I was now dreadfully afraid. I could not rid my mind of the name, the Doom of Ravenswood. It was plain enough what the meaning must be. And to think that I had lived on the plantation all those years and had not known it! Sometimes I had wondered how I should have to die; but I had never pictured a scene like this, never!

Above me were the mocking willow branches, far out of reach, and beyond them a glimpse of the happy blue sky. Behind me was the ominous morass. Before me, just near enough for the tips of my fingers to touch it, shone the little sand bank whose clean, inviting footing had lured me to my doom. Beneath me was — a sudden faintness overpowered me, and my eyes swam in dazzling

darkness. The cold and gradual creeping of the water up my body filled me with nameless loathing and terror.

I must have prayed wildly, screamed madly, for help, for rescue, for strength to die bravely! But it is little indeed that I remember of those dreadful moments while the sands sucked me relentlessly down. I recall that a water-snake swam near me, forcing his way cautiously through the flag stems. How I envied him his safety! He glinted at me with sharp yellow glassy eyes, then swam furtively on. A hermit thrush, sequestered far in the dewiest heart of the silence-mantled swamp, fluted a mellow song. It sounded spiritual, and as from another world. A curious bluejay dashed into a near-by bush, peered at me impertinently, scolded me softly and querulously, then flew away with glorious freedom, screaming derisively. Nature seemed to have no heart for my misfortunes, no sympathy, no help for my peril. And I had loved her so!

The sands were now gripping me about the waist with their sliding, insidious fingers. The pressure and my fright made me breathe harder, and I grew cold through all my frame. As a boy I had always been accounted strong; and as a man my knowledge of the woods, my agility, my muscular resourcefulness were among the proudest of my personal possessions. But none of these things now availed me. Rather did they appear drawbacks; for they made me eager to struggle, where to struggle was fatal. My heart and my muscles cried out for me to let them save me. But I should wait quietly, I knew, should wait quietly — O God! I cried, for what should I wait so quietly, so gently? What could I gain by inaction? Slowly, grimly, I was sinking in the ruthless quicksands. Mine was the Doom of Ravenswood. On that lonely road, and with the twilight falling, I could not possibly hope for a passerby to help me. My fate lay in my own hands; and wretched fate, where to put forth the strength of which I was so proud was but to sink deeper, to strangle, and to die!

With a quavering voice I called to Redbird, the horse that I loved and that loved me. I wanted to look into his eyes, to try to make him understand. If ever there was a time when he might help me, when I needed him, now was that time. I called him gently, and he whinneyed his affection, lifting his head out of the

deep roadside grass. In his great eyes I seemed to see a comprehending light; but it was doubtless only fear and curiosity.

With trembling fingers I picked a pitiful little wisp of bitter sawgrass and held it entreatingly toward him. "Come, Redbird," I said, "come, old boy."

He gazed at me with undetermined, lustrous eyes. I felt that he did not want the grass, and I could not blame him. But he *had* to come! He just *had* to come! There was no one else to save me; and surely my Redbird would not desert me in my extremity of peril. If he would swing that loose bridle near enough to me, he might pull me out by it. But before I could reach the reins he would have to come at least part of the way on the treacherous sands. He might go down with me; or, feeling his footing giving way, he might plunge out, never to be tempted near me again.

About my breast now the tawny monster clung, seeking its prey! It was climbing up, always up. It was trying to clutch my throat, I knew. It would completely cover my chest; then my neck and chin; and then it would smother me, strangle me, drown me. And the black waters and the crawling sands would close over me silently, and close over me forever!

Running through my feverish brain were the tragic lines from Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor*,—

> "He shall stable his steed in the Kelpie's flow,
> And his name shall be lost forevermore."

Those who have had hairbreadth escapes from great danger can seldom describe their experiences calmly, if they describe them truly. And when I think of the dread grip of that black hole, even now I cannot suppress a shudder and a sickness at heart. I remember at that moment, as if looking on them for the last time, how blue and sweet was the sky, tinged with the sunset's gold; how misty and still the woods, how beautiful the wide world from whose vision I was being brutally dragged.

Savagely risking the peril of the effort, I grasped a handful of the fatal blue flags, wrenched them off, and held them with desperate entreaty toward the faithful Redbird. He took a step toward me, then another. The sands already had him round the fetlocks, yet he came on, his head outstretched toward the flowers, and the precious bridle dangling low. He felt the undertow, and

he walked gingerly. Yet now he reached his head out far, far. I, too, strained forward, both hands clutching the flowers. Was he close enough? If I frightened him, he would bound away. I prayed.

My effort of reaching forward had caused the sands to drag me heavily downward. They closed over my shoulders. They flowed about my throat, fondling it coldly. With a last despairing cry I threw out my arms, and my hands gripped the reins with a grip of death. My fingers were steel bands. My breath was all but gone. My strength seemed pressed up into my arms.

Redbird threw up his head, snorting, backing, plunging. He racked and tore my shoulders cruelly. Then he lay back on the bridle, and I grew sick over the mortal strain. He sank in the sands; his powerful neck arched, and his shapely breast-muscles rippled and swelled. And out of the pit I came, out of the horrible morass he drew me, out on the hard white sands, out on the friendly green grass, out into the wide, sweet world again, Redbird, my Redbird!

The Roof Cradle.*

BY SARAH R. QUIGLEY.

RUDELY fashioned of boards and covered thick with bright green paint, the cradle stood there, half buried in snow, on the shed roof of the lean-to kitchen. Mary Wetzel saw it, when, at the first dawn after her occupation of the tarred-paper shack across the road from the deserted cottage, she wiped the frost from her half window to look out, and her worn face lighted up with a flicker of sympathy.

"Stranded," she murmured. Then she craned her neck at the porthole of a window to survey her own and the cradle's environment.

Along the narrow road which led to the toy freight and passenger depot, straggled a line of habitations. Some were painted; some of new boards; others black in their coats of tarred paper. One characteristic they held in common — all were diminutive. There was enough material in one of the great piles of logs which lined the railroad track to have built all of them.

It was not the deserted cabins that brought a feeling of desolation to the heart of Mary Wetzel, or made her shudder for the loneliness of the green cradle upon the roof; it was the acres on acres of weathered stumps protruding from the whiteness of the snow, and the tangled, sprawling heaps of saw logs and poles and posts that lay all along the track. There was nothing about this timber deposit that looked like the work of man. Such confusion should have been caused by an inundation of frothing waters, which had suddenly receded, leaving the victims of its frenzy stranded, in all the ugly contortions of their battle with the current.

And so it had been, a battle of the logging industry with the wave of financial depression. Mary Wetzel and her young brother had been defeated in a business venture some distance up the

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track, and she had come this far, while he went on to seek retrievement in new fields.

The late northern spring finally came, and warm suns made rivers of the snow, flooding the streets and few sidewalks of the little town. Then Mary Wetzel sat through the middle of the day in her door, which opened to the south, and worked at some sewing for the hotel-keeper's wife. As she worked, she glanced now and then at her comrade, the green cradle upon the shed roof. Was it more lonely, or less lonely since its snow draperies had melted away and brought its useless rockers into relief against the blue and white of the changing sky? How had it come there? Was there a baby? Certainly, there had been a baby in the cottage. Perhaps the family had fled the cold of a northern winter, to take the little one back home to Grandmother, and mild skies. But this thought made Mary grudgeful of the happiness that existed somewhere, far away; it ruptured the comradeship. She liked to imagine that the little baby was sleeping out there, under the faint green that now began to tinge the black loam of the hillside beyond the stumps; and that the rude cradle was lonely, except when the wind came and rocked it gently, gently to and fro.

But one morning, when the marsh at the foot of the hill was all golden with cowslips, and Mary had received encouraging news from her brother, she looked across at the bright green cradle, glinting in the sun, with hope in her eyes and a presage of coming joy in her heart. This was a world of good things unexplored, even for a woman of forty. It was coming — something. Why should it not concern the cradle too? Mary fell to expecting a tenant for the cottage, with a baby for the cradle.

A few days later they came. Mary Wetzel saw the dark-haired young man enter the cottage, with the child upon his arm, the fuzzy hood and its border of yellow curls snuggled against his neck.

Then she fluttered between her small door and her half of a small window, looking for the rest of the family. But they did not arrive that day. A trunk came and a packing box, that was all.

Late into the night there was sawing and hammering across

the road. For in that country, people were their own cabinet-makers, and a few rough boards were potential of bed, table and chairs.

In the morning Mary Wetzel awoke with a flutter of anticipation. It was the day that she was to make a neighborly call. The mother of the yellow-haired child would come on the morning train, probably. And Mary, if they had not already discovered it, would offer her cradle from their own shed roof. With a slight pang of relinquishment, she noticed that the cradle was gone.

There were newspapers pinned at the windows, over there; across the lower half, just where the child might have looked out. Later in the day they were taken down, and the young man himself was fixing up muslin curtains to the windows. What strange employment for the man of the house! A boyish-looking man he was, too, with smooth face, as delicately tinted as a girl's.

Into the window, close to the young man's legs, popped the yellow curls of the child, all a tangle, around a pink, smiling flower of a face, and Mary could see, even from that distance, that the eyes were very big and blue.

"I don't care, it's a boy," she told herself, no matter if he does have them eyes. Its father's a girlish-looking thing; and I wonder what its mother — "

Mary watched and watched. Finally she sank upon a bench with a strange pulling at her heart. Could it be that there was no mother? Gradually a smile lighted up her plain countenance, while her eyes filled with tears; then she laughed with a note of exultation. Why, it was hers; the baby had come to her!

Between her desire to go across to the new neighbor's and her timidity about intruding upon the solitary young man, Mary Wetzel could accomplish nothing all day with her needle or about the work of her two bare little rooms.

Towards sunset she went out into the misty warmth of the May evening, pervaded with the fragrant smoke of burning brush, to walk through the chips and bark of the cedar yards, scramble over scattered poles, and cross the tracks to the impromptu huddle of buildings that formed the business portion of the town of Tenstrike. At the grocery store she found a box of apples, smooth, red and luscious, just in by express. They were the first she had

seen in all winter. She bought three of them with the money she had intended for butter, and hurried back, past the crowd at the post office, waiting for the daily mail, across the tracks and through the odorous litter of the cedar yards, to her own door. There she took her purchase from the sack, and carried her three perfect red apples in her hands, across the street. She knocked at the door of her new neighbor's. It was growing dusk, and the little face was gone from the window.

After a long interval, the door opened and the young man stood before her. Where was the girlish delicacy that she had imagined? With all its youthfulness, it was a strong face, with set mouth and gloomy, dark eyes.

"Good evening, I hope you're gettin' settled all right. If there's anything — " His unresponsive stare made her hesitate. "I wanted the baby — the little boy," she reached out the apples with palsied hands, "to have these."

"Thank you, but I'd rather he wouldn't have them," returned the young man in a strained voice.

The flush that crimsoned the clear skin of his face as he began slowly to close the door upon his visitor, blazoned him as unused to the rôle he had assumed.

Mary Wetzel got back across the street and into her darkening little room. Letting the apples thump upon the table, one after the other, she sat down. She was not insulted, not angry; she was wronged, bereaved. She and the green cradle had been unfairly dealt with. But the child, the blue-eyed boy — he had not repulsed her.

Thinking of the little face at the window, she arose, hunted some scraps of tissue paper from her trunk, wrapped each apple carefully and placed them in the top till, closing the lid.

When the young man had inaugurated his housekeeping, he took to going to work every morning with an ax on his shoulder. He had engaged Bennie Thompson, a crippled boy, to mind the child through the day.

This choked the final breath from Mary Wetzel's hope. For she had reasoned quite cheerily, "Whatever will he do with the little boy when he goes to work?" And her arms and heart tingled with the expectancy of at last holding the prize.

"He says to Bennie, he don't want no woman ever to have anything to do for his little boy." This report came from Bennie's mother, with the added comment, "Mighty queer, ain't he? Never has spoke to anybody in town that he didn't have to."

Mary said nothing, but she noticed that the young man looked every day more bent and weather-beaten and shaggy, as he went to and from work with his shouldered ax; and that when he was not going to work, he always carried the child about with him.

The baby, too, appeared more neglected as the weeks went by. Mary noted him carefully every day, playing about the dooryard and in the clay of the road. The father managed to keep him clean, as babies go. But his aprons grew faded and shabby. His curls were always full of snarls. Still, he was happy as a bird. He learned to smile at Mary in her doorway, the frank and friendly smile of a two-year-old. Doubtless he would have visited her without invitation, if he had not been carefully guarded.

But Mary noticed that nurse Bennie was becoming less diligent as the days went by. It was about this time that, obeying a foolish but imperative impulse, she bought gingham at the general store and fashioned some little frocks, taking the baby's measure at long range with her dressmaker's eye. These she put away in her trunk.

Then, one afternoon, the little fellow came wavering across her threshold, bareheaded, like a spot of sunshine. With a cry of joy, she held out her hands, and he met them with chubby fists. If a humming bird had flown in at the door and lighted upon either outstretched palm, it would not have given her so delicious a thrill. Snuggling him close to her breast, she looked deep into those eyes. They showed nothing of the father's; the mother must have had such — the mother —

With a deft touch Mary combed out and smoothed the yellow curls about her fingers, as she used to do her little brother's. Then, tremulously, she took from the trunk one of the new dresses and put it on him in place of his soiled and torn little garment. Proud? he was very proud, and as dainty as a bluebell.

"What is your name, honey love?"

"Tibby," that was the nearest he could come to "Sylvan."

Bennie had told her that his name was Sylvan. He must have had a fanciful mother.

To keep him as long as possible, she brought out her only picture book, an old family album; one treasure that she had not discarded in her wanderings.

The baby put his finger on every picture, gurgling delightedly at the grotesques of bygone styles. One attracted him more than the others, a red-cheeked tintype of Mary's mother as a girl.

"Mom-ma, mom-ma," he softly murmured, rubbing his finger all over it.

"Where is your mama, Tibby love?" asked Mary, straining him to her.

The great, blue eyes widened away into space. "All gone," he breathed, "All gone."

At that instant the little door was darkened. Lingering over the embrace, Mary lifted her head slowly to meet the strange, white look of the young man. It was remarkable how he had changed in these few weeks. Of course, the beard would have caused it. And the delicate tints of his complexion were lost from working out every day. But a sort of hunger had taken the place of the sternness she had seen in his eyes, and his mouth — that was hidden by the beard.

Mary looked up at him fearlessly, for she felt the protecting imprint of a little hand upon her neck. Then she was seized with pity and tenderness for both of them, and her eyes filled with tears.

"It's time he was going home," spoke the man, not ungently, and, as an afterthought of apology, "I didn't know he was here."

Silently, and with a quivering smile, Mary relinquished the child into his father's arms.

"By, by!" Tibby piped from the doorway, paddling the air with an awkward little hand.

"By, by, honey love!"

Mary Wetzel did not sleep that night, for the morrow was too full of possibilities. From early dawn she kept a lookout at her little window. When the young man emerged with the ax on his shoulder, and the baby came toddling after him as

far as the door, dressed in the little new frock, Mary breathed a long sigh of satisfaction. With this token of the fulfilment of her desire, she knew that the cradle and the baby had come back to her.

If only it could have stopped with this unbelievable happiness. But before night her hands and her heart were full of responsibility and grief. It was mid-afternoon when they brought the young man home, lying as dead, upon a stretcher improvised of boards and a blanket. He had been hurt by a falling tree, and for surgical aid they must await the evening train from the south; there was no doctor in Tenstrike.

Contending with a house full of people, who tarried in the bungling and futile kindness of their hearts, Mary did what she could. It was very little. She performed a few housewifely services about the cottage, and tried to keep an eye on nurse Bennie, who was minding the little boy out of doors. The young man remained unconscious.

When the time for the train drew near, she ran out at intervals to listen and look down the track, as though she would speed the help it was to bring. What was the meaning of that special crowd at the station? Mary remembered that a play was to be given that night at the town of Blackduck, ten miles up the track. So the people who habitually met the train at Tenstrike were reinforced by many more; for there would be an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the theatrical company, passing through.

The shriek of the whistle, away down the track, which brought the one daily pulse of interest to many of the inhabitants of the town, now caused Mary an acute pain of suspense. She shaded her eyes with her hand, against the setting sun, to watch the smoke as it became visible above a distant wall of pines; another instant, and the train drew in. It paused, it stopped, and waited. That meant a passenger. For, otherwise, the engine would only have hovered, panting and champing to be away, while the mail sack landed with a thump and a flap upon the platform.

In this relief from uncertainty about the doctor, Mary thought of her baby, whom she had momentarily forgotten. He and

Bennie had disappeared. While she was scanning the crowd on the platform for sight of him, a group of people separated from the others and came down the walk and across the tracks, towards the cedar yards. Was it an escort for the man with a square black grip in his hand? No, there was some other attraction, for the doctor soon outdistanced the group, and there came Bennie, limping beside his little charge, who was carried in the arms of a festively arrayed young woman. It was a strange and incongruous gaity of attire; a hat like a boiler lid, bristling with the glinting plumage of a dozen barnyard cocks, all filled out underneath with billows of yellow hair. A triangle of plump white neck defied the draperies of the red blouse, against which gleamed the rank luxuriance of an over-sized brooch. Mary took in these details unconsciously as they drew gradually nearer, thinking only of the baby's safety and the help that had come to the young man. When she met them, near the cottage door, she saw that the woman's great blue eyes, raised to hers from under darkly penciled lids, were wild and deep with anguish and affright,—and that they were Tibby's eyes.

She took the blithely unknowing child from the young woman's benumbed clasp. "I'll take him with me," she murmured, for she could not bear to see that expression in eyes so like her baby's.

Into her own shack she hurried and tried to shut herself away from the tragic complications at the little cottage. For one night, perhaps, she might keep her baby, and then — the young man — her young man would die, and that gaudy thing would take their child, for it was useless to tell herself that the woman was not Tibby's mother.

Far into the night she sat guard over her pink little sleeper. Towards morning she lay down beside him; and then it was dawn, and she sprang up, dreading to look across the street.

The curtains were drawn at the windows and all was silent. She would go over — she must go, to learn ——

The door opened and the young woman in the red blouse came out, walking unsteadily. Mary hastened to meet her.

"He — he is dead?" she breathed, as she read in those wide blue eyes and that drawn face with the travesty of bloom stub-

bornly clinging to the cheeks, a deeper pain than she had seen the night before.

The young woman shook her head, and Mary drew her into the little room where the baby still lay sleeping.

"Not dead?"

The woman gulped, and, as she sank upon a bench by the table, managed to speak.

"He's better; the doctor said he was stunned, and hurt, someway, in his side; he's awake now."

She threw her arms upon the table and buried her face in them.

Mary, with a reckless mingling of triumph and dread, laid her hand upon the woman's shoulder.

"What is it? Tell me what is wrong."

"He — he won't have me — he sent me away."

Then an iron sternness drove the exultation from Mary's face.

"You, you," she said, in a tone that brought the fantastically dishevelled head erect, "you are the mother of that baby," pointing to the softly breathing little form under the quilt, "and you deserted him!"

The woman stood up and reached out her hands towards the bed.

"I didn't desert him," she spoke rapidly, "indeed I didn't. I only went out for a trip, and Mother was doing for them, and he took Sylvan away where we couldn't find them."

She went to the bed and buried her face in the pillow beside the baby.

He awoke and bored his dimpled fists into the wonderful cushions of yellow hair, and when she lifted her tear-stained face to kiss him, he gurgled, "Mom-ma."

Mary Wetzel stood watching them with burning eyes. Suddenly she threw back her head and laughed, a hard laugh. At the sound of it, a scourged expression came into her face. She wheeled about, opened her trunk and took out the second little pale blue frock she had made for Tibby, laying it across a bench. Then she rummaged further in her battered treasure chest and drew forth a dark blue polka dot blouse, one of her

own, smooth, starched and fresh. She looked at it and tucked it back, pulling together a concealment of other garments, half guiltily. At once she burrowed it out again, and this time contemplated it long, held aloft in her hand, with an intensity of distraction.

"You got any other dress with you?" she inquired at last of that made-up creature on the bed, with arms around her baby.

No; the girl's luggage had gone on with the players.

"Well, you'd better put some cold water on your face and take them patent rats out of your hair," she instructed, still searching in her trunk with disordering haste.

She wanted her white, crocheted collar, the one she had always considered too good to wear. She found it.

When Mary had the baby all ready but his curls, the girl mother, half doubtful of her own appearance, in the neat, blue polka dot blouse and smoothly parted, tawny hair, turned away from the little mirror. Mary looked into the soft face and big, blue eyes, so appealing, so much like her baby's — and there was no more sacrifice. She hurried in her dressing of the child, all eagerness to show them to the young man.

"I'll go first, with the baby," she said to the girl, "and you follow."

The young man lay there, pale and grim, on his improvised bed of rough planks. In his eyes dwelt the sombre look with which he had first confronted Mary. Even the gleeful "pop-pa," of his little boy, clinging to Mary's hand, brought no response.

Then the girl came trembling in.

"Mom-ma, mom-ma." The child slipped away from Mary to take his mother by the hand and toddle towards the bed.

"See," he lisped, "poor pop-pa." He laid a soft, pink little palm over the twitching lips of the young man.

The girl dropped to her knees beside the pillow. And with a struggle the hardness in the young man's face broke up. Slowly, slowly, and with great pain, he put out his arm and drew both yellow heads down together.

What the Neva Knows.*

BY J. W. MITCHELL.

OW, about Petro. He was a type, one of the class that drives the horse cars in St. Petersburg. He had been driving some years before he met Betta, driving on the line that runs up the north side of the Neva and ends, or did at that time, near the Kalstroskinsky Gardens, over beyond the northeast corner of the city.

He usually dined at the little tea-house near the Gardens, because it was cheap and dirty and close to where his day's work ended. He lived at the other end of the line in a cellar that was flooded every time the water rose in the Neva.

It never occurred to him to move up to the other end of the line, so that he would not have to tramp five miles to and from work; which is a fair indication of the mentality the street car driving mujik possesses. Therefore he walked and saved the car fare, since the company would not let him ride free on the cars except when he was driving them.

He may be said to have lived without impressions or anything more than the most rudimentary thoughts and no opinion until finally Betta came into his life. She was short and squat, with expressionless blue eyes and the straight, flaxen hair found among the peasants over in Finland. She promised to be fat and baggy toward middle life, if not sooner, and her mental equipment seemed about on a par with her personal charms.

She was a waitress in the shack where Petro ate. During the interludes of her service in the front of the house, she helped to cook and wash pots and pans in the kitchen. But she was careful and attentive, if not strictly clean. She always gave Petro's dish a final wipe on her apron before setting it down, and she could always tell him whether the beef stew was better than

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the meat balls, or fetch him an extra full bowl of cabbage soup and an unbusinesslike lot of black bread if it was a day when he was short of money and could not buy a full dinner.

Slowly it dawned upon him that she appealed to him. At first he would wipe the cabbage soup from his beard with the back of his hand and linger for a few words when dinner was over. The words grew into sentences, and daily he spent more and more time conversing with this Circe of the Pans. At the same time neither of them was garrulous. No one who watched it would have suspected that it was love making. The customer would sit hunched up over his plate, talking with his charmer in monosyllables through his thick beard.

Later stages were more acute. Petro would hang around the outside of the house, making majhaka cigarettes and waiting till Betta was through with her work. Then he would walk home with her. She lived on the ground floor looking out on an unkept court in the Vassili Ostroff district. So it was a good long walk home.

Sometimes he would stop at the tenement and visit for an hour or two. He usually sat on the edge of the table, never taking off his sheepskin-lined overcoat, even when the weather was warm. Betta was always glad to see him and welcomed him hospitably. She would use the only chair in the room and sit to sew by the dim lamp with its uncleaned chimney. Sometimes they would exchange scarcely a word through the visit except, "Good night, God abide with thee," at parting. But that was their way of courting.

Sometimes they would thread the long, narrow streets down to the waterside and silently lean for an hour on the stone coping by the river, watching the wood barges unload and the lights of the swift little passenger steamers flashing by in the gloom.

Once Petro was reckless and spent twenty kopecs (about ten cents) on tickets of the third class for the Zoological Gardens. There they stood and watched the performance in the free open air theatre, saw the animals fed and heard the gipsy band play in the pavilion. Betta did not even thank him for the treat. But three days thereafter, sitting by the dim lamp in her room, she looked up from mending an old chemise and said, "That was

fine, the Gardens." Petro nodded. He knew that she had appreciated it.

They were quite happy in their own way till the barber intervened. He worked in a small and very dim and dusty shop down a side street off the Balshi Prospeckt. Perhaps he did not make much more than Petro. But barbering is a more aristocratic calling than is street-car driving. He always smelt of pomatum and essences, which is very alluring. Once he gave Betta a bottle of perfumery. It came surreptitiously out of the shop, of course. But it was good for all that, and Petro never asked about it. In many ways he was not observant.

The barber was the better looking man of the two. Sometimes he wore his white working jacket after shop hours, but he never wore a patched and ragged fur-lined overcoat flapping about his heels. And instead of a bushy red beard growing up to his eyes, and a greasy cloth cap coming down on his forehead, he had a most entrancing black moustache, curled upward à la Kaiser. His hair was always slick and shiny, and was brushed away from his forehead with a bewitching little quirk that comes from using plenty of pomatum and brushing the hair up over your forefinger. Yes, he was much the better looking man, and he got tips, too, in addition to his wages, which was of course out of the question with Petro.

Whether his intentions were strictly honorable will never be known. It is to be suspected that they were not. Anyhow, Petro came to the court at the wrong time one afternoon and found Betta in Erbach's arms. Then it was proved which was really the better man. The great, round-shouldered driver filled up the whole of the doorway. He said nothing articulate, but growled in his shaggy throat, being a man of scant speech. That was enough for the barber, who was a social butterfly — of a sort — and not a person of war. Fortunately the double windows had not been closed for the winter and Erbach, guilty or not, felt that he was on forbidden ground and decamped through the window nearest the exit from the court. But not until the heavy, braided whip with which Petro beat the car horses had ripped across his neck and raised a welt that lasted for days.

Betta was left to make her own explanations, in the course of

which she was knocked down and kicked. Petro tried to bring her to, but she did not respond either to cold water or to feathers burned under her nose. Anyhow if she eventually came round, she would testify against him for murderous assault. So he finished the job with a potato masher.

Petro had not originally intended to kill Betta. He had struck her in a fit of brute fury such as comes to any animal robbed of its mate. When he saw that she was seriously hurt and that she would be a bad witness against him in court if she recovered, he finished up the job with the cold blooded thoroughness characteristic of the mujik class. That temperament, by the way, is the thing that will make a peasant uprising, if it ever comes to that in Russia, about the bloodiest carnival human beings have ever conceived. There will not be much in it fit to print, and the reddest days of the French Terror will look like a bean feast beside it.

Disposing of the body thus remained the only problem. Discovery meant transportation; Irkutsk at the best, and more probably Sakhalin. The latter, as any Russian will tell you, is a few degrees worse than hanging. They cannot hang for ordinary murder in Russia, as there is no capital punishment except under martial law, or for the killing of a member of the imperial family.

Petro lit a cigarette and sat down till dusk to think it over. Disposal of the remains anywhere about the tenement was out of the question. There was the river or one of the many canals. But the police have an uncomfortably thorough system of dragging the canals, and a body thrown into the swift Neva has a great habit of turning up at some inconvenient and unexpected place.

He thought and thought in the slow, plodding manner of his class, and at last as the sun was going down for its too brief dip in the Baltic, he was struck with a brilliant idea. The old government granaries. He knew the place where they were up on the north bank of the river. He had been there once in the day time, and the rats, Oh, there were thousands of them! They would pick a body clean in a few days at most, and then — well, it is hard work identifying a skeleton.

Petro had never been to the granaries at night. They are an eerie enough place even by daylight. Neither did he know of the case of an Englishman who foolishly, on a bet, sent a favorite bull terrier into the old culvert there. The dog never came out. So the granary idea struck him as a good one, though it was not, and he made Betta into as compact a bundle as possible, utilizing his own big overcoat as an outside wrapper. Then he cautiously started out.

It was rather nerve trying, even to a man with few nerves, to walk boldly out of the court with the body slung like a peddler's pack over his back. But it was dusky and Petro did it without attracting attention. The switzar was not at the door of the court as he should have been, but was drinking one of his seventeen daily glasses of tea with his wife in the basement. There was no guard-a-voy in sight in the street, and when safe around the first corner Petro breathed easier. He was safe for a time, if not for all time.

As has been said, the granaries are a bad enough place in the daytime. After night they are worse. Inside the huge, towering structures are thousands upon thousands of bushels of government rye and barley, the basis of the black bread with which the army is fed. Down in the well-like basement there are rooms. Perhaps they were originally intended as guard-rooms, but they have long been abandoned; and the guard camps in a separate structure over on the north side.

The basement rooms are not used now, but that does not mean that they are not tenanted. Local superstition has it that they are haunted. But this is probably untrue. At any rate, people do not go there after dusk, and as for the cavernous drains under the building that empty through a gully down to the river, well, it has been years since they were explored and it is said that it is more than a man's life is worth to go into them. But Petro did not know this or if he had heard he did not care.

He skirted the bank of the river to the south of the towering, fort-like structures. It was strangely cold, and there was an oppressive smell about the mouth of the gully, a smell that his nose, used to smells of many sorts, had never before encountered. In spite of the chill in the air, he was perspiring freely. Probably

it was the exertion. Betta was no featherweight in life, and it was the best part of five miles that he had come. The moon was not yet up and the shadows cast in the bottom of the ravine were inky black.

He rested a little while and then climbed down the sloping bank. There was a half suppressed moan in the air, almost like the rushing of the river outside. But it could not have been water, for the bottom of the ravine, when he reached it, slipping and sliding, was quite dry. Once on the bottom, the air was closer and deader than ever.

The long, toilsome walk must have greatly overwrought his senses, for he could have sworn that the bottom of the gully was studded with glowworms. Yet there were never glowworms together in such numbers. The ground seemed speckled with them, little points of phosphorescence. More likely they were inside his own head after all, for they were never within reach. He could not tread on one. They seemed always just beyond him, receding as he advanced and following him up behind.

At the same time through the chill, damp air there was the sense rather than the sound of motion, something like the gliding of a snake on the ground or the stripping of covering from a bed in a dark room. Anyhow it was a shivery, uncanny place and he would be glad to get out of it.

Ahead of him at the top of the ravine loomed a shadow darker than the rest. It was the mouth of the culvert. Petro edged along, involuntarily glancing over his shoulder, in the darkness, for he was oppressed with a feeling of some one or something following him. Inside the mouth of the culvert, he threw his bundle on the ground. There was an angry squeak and a rush about his feet. He must have pitched the body right on some rats. Well so much the better if there were so many of them. They would do his work the quicker. He stooped in the darkness to undo the lashings about the bundle. It fairly moved under his hands. Could it be possible that she was not dead after all ?

Then there came a scurry of little feet across his hands and another rush about his legs. The place was fairly alive with the rats and they were already swarming over the half unwrapped

body. Mankind has an instinctive dread of this vermin of the drains. He flinched at the touch of the hurrying bodies and cast loose the rope more quickly.

Now there was no illusion about it. The darkness was alive with burning eyes and the air full of the scamper of hurrying feet. Something had sprung on his back. He dashed it off as well as he could and fought blindly in the gloom with his bare hands. Something soft rolled under foot and he half fell with his hands clutching at furry little bodies that squeaked with rage and bit savagely at his fingers. He stamped and fought to free himself. Rats were crushed under his feet and his own blood dripped from his finger tips. That was enough. The smell of blood was in the heavy air, and the rats, emboldened by it, swept over him in shoals.

The moon was up above the river now and showed at the mouth of the culvert a writhing, swarming mass. The gully was moving with thousands upon thousands of rats that had been down to the river for their evening drink. They came up in regiments and armies. They bit and tore at the body on the ground and at the man fighting and struggling to get away from it. He tried to run, but his foot caught in a fold of the great coat, bringing him to the ground in the midst of a worrying mass of the vermin.

Caution was all gone now. Petro was fighting for his life and he screamed aloud for help. But he had as well beat on the roof of a tomb. The night watchmen whom at first he had feared, were all on the far side of the granaries, and on the higher ground.

He fought and struggled down the gully with rats blocking his way and rats tearing at his legs, that were long since bare and bleeding. Rats overwhelmed him in waves, leaped in his face and tore at his throat.

He tried to scale the steep bank, got half way up and fell back with his hands full of the loose, treacherous soil and swarms of rats all over him, clinging to him like bees and squeaking fiendishly in their mad fight for blood. He was a living mass of the relentless little animals as he scrambled desperately to his feet.

Blindly he fought his way down the gully, now falling and disappearing under a swarm of dark bodies, now up again and fighting as a drowning man fights at nothing. Weakness was gaining on him and he knew it. There was a trail of dead rats behind him, but fresh legions scrambled at him from every side. They were eating him alive.

Blinded, suffocated and wholly spent, he reached the water. His enemies hung to him neck deep in the stream. And then the Neva with a rushing chuckle, swept him off his feet.

There is a part of a driver's weekly wages still unclaimed at the office of the concha-line where he used to work. But it will be turned back into the treasury when the books are balanced at the end of the year.

The Rural Districts.*

BY MICHAEL WHITE.

HIS story must be told in George Charles Fenton-Bolitho's own words, because otherwise justice cannot be done to him. At all times the hyphen between Fenton and Bolitho must be remembered, for the reason that it is important he should not be confused with other Bolithos who dwell in sundry parts of England. Fenton-Bolitho hailed from Tipton Grange within what might now be appropriately termed a manfly from London, and was encountered on a steamer with her bow turned toward Europe and the shore of the United States fading in the distance. He was what the reporters would call typically English, wore a check tweed suit, and a manner of injury sustained that was beautiful in its innocence.

"I have reason to agree with you," said Fenton-Bolitho, "that the United States is an extraordinarily large country. In that respect I have had a really remarkable experience. Quite astonishing when you come to think of it! My doctor, you know, considered that my health would be benefited by an ocean voyage, so I thought I would visit our cousins across the Atlantic. Please do not misunderstand me for a moment that I was otherwise than most gratified with the conditions I found prevailing in your country; but — ah — I feel sure you will agree with me when I say I encountered an inexplicably annoying experience.

"I had spent a few days very enjoyably in New York, when it occurred to me that my friends at the club would naturally wish to know my impressions of the rural districts, the — er — the condition of your agricultural population, which is such a matter of grave concern to us in the British Isles. So with that object I made inquiries and was recommended to one of those

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people you call a ticket agent. I found him a very agreeable young man, willing to do almost anything to oblige me. I explained to him my desire to see a little of the country, particularly what we understood as the rural districts — our midland and southern counties, you know. But when he asked where precisely I wished to go, I naturally replied that I must leave that to his discretion, being a stranger merely wishing to see something of the rural districts.

"He then suggested a trip to San Diego. As I had never even heard of the place, I remarked that, provided it was a pleasant and salubrious spot, I was prepared to follow his advice in going to San Diego. He was really so attentive in pointing out the advantages of booking immediately, that I promised to recommend him to any members of my club who should contemplate visiting your country. I fear I formed a too hasty judgment of that young man's ability. I regret to say I shall not recommend him to any of my friends after my experience.

"The young man charged me what I thought at the time was a rather large sum to see something of the rural districts, but one must be prepared for such things in visiting strange and distant countries. He also gave me a most remarkably long ticket, and told me I was to start that evening on a train he called the Limited. As a significant illustration of the young man's singular lack of fitness for his position, he was utterly unable to explain why the train was called the Limited. Really, he seemed to regard my insistence on this point as a piece of humorous pleasantry, I assure you, quite out of place.

"But I, of course, took the Limited, and upon my word there was apparently very little limitation to the distance it traveled. I was astonished — I may say almost dumfounded — when I discovered I was actually to travel for five days through the rural districts. I give you my word I had never contemplated such a journey. Five days, you know, going through the rural districts. Of course I would never have undertaken it had I been aware of the extraordinary distance to San Diego.

"But the point is, I cannot understand why the young man — the ticket agent — should have been so remarkably stupid as to advise me to go to San Diego. When I reached that place I found

it is not in the rural districts at all. As you may be aware, San Diego is a seaport on the Pacific. I found myself, therefore, looking at the water — the ocean — which I think any intelligent ticket agent should have known was not my objective, because I had seen quite enough of the — ah — water coming over, don't you know?

"I was positively indignant and at once retraced my steps to New York for an explanation of the ticket agent's conduct. But you will hardly believe me when I say, that when I complained to the ticket agent that I had found San Diego not in the rural districts, his answer was, that he naturally supposed I would have seen enough of the darned things — I believe that was his curious expression — on the trip across the continent. I immediately lodged a complaint with his superior officer, and I shall write about it to the *Times* directly I reach England. I trust your papers will take the matter up, and that public opinion will compel the — er — ticket agents not to sell passages in such extraordinarily haphazard fashion."

"But don't you think," asked the stranger on shipboard, sympathetically, but with a hand on his chin, "that the ticket agent may have had a personal motive in sending you across the continent to San Diego?"

"How could he?" retorted Fenton-Bolitho. "He simply didn't know that San Diego was not, properly speaking, in the rural districts. He sent me there, I presume, trusting to chance that it might be so. But, My Word! I think I made the fact plain to him."

At the McKinstra Ranch.*

BY MAUCHLINE MUIR.

ORRIS had been traveling long when the trail began to climb the cañon wall and came out at last on the plain above. From here the pale peaks showed in mystic splendor, wrapped in the miracle of silence which seemed to flood them. The bottom of the gorge from which he had just come forth was lost in a sea of purple the moonlight could not pierce.

It was with a little shock of delight that his eyes fell upon the McKinstra ranch. Almost at his feet it lay, in a saucer-shaped valley swimming in the silvery light of a chill moon. But his surprise was swept away in the greater one of a woman's figure leaning against the flat rock which marked the sharp depression of the trail. Her back was toward him, but something in the dejected attitude told she was in tears.

Unconsciously his hand had drawn the broncho to a halt. He was still sitting in the first uncertainty of his amazement when he saw her little clenched fist shaken toward the ranch house below.

"I won't. I won't. I'd rather be lying in my grave," she passionately burst out.

Some movement of the pony arrested her attention and she turned a startled face upon the intruder.

"Who are you? What are you doing hyer?" she asked swiftly, the note of challenge clear in her low voice.

"I am on my way to Lone Cone Park and want a night's lodging at the McKinstra ranch. My name is Norris — Phil Norris."

"Any kin to Jed Norris?"

She flung it at him with a bitterness that should have been

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foreign to youth so superbly endowed with health and good looks.

"I'm his brother."

"Then you air brother to a miscreant."

His quiet answer to her unbridled impetuosity rebuked her hostility.

"That isn't news. I've known him twenty-seven years."

"Then why air you travelin' so fur to see him?" she demanded, the suspicion in her black eyes not yet laid.

"Does a man never have business with any but those he respects?"

She gave him no answer, unless it was one to throw her hand out in a careless gesture toward the lights of the ranch house.

"You'll find him down there I reckon."

"I thought he lived in the Park?"

"Cayn't a man be anywhere but the place he lives? You don't live in Lost Cañon, do ye?"

"No, I don't," he smiled. "Do you?"

It was impossible wholly to resist the frank good humor of his manner. She nodded sullenly toward the valley.

"That's where I live."

"You are Miss McKinstra?"

She flushed. "I reckon. Folks call me McKinstra's Nell."

"Then you can guide me to the ranch?"

The girl swung on her heel without a word and took the valley trail. Norris followed, leading his horse. It seemed to him that he had never seen a stage so beautifully set with lowered lights as this which stretched before them. Something of the kind he said to her by way of making talk, and added that he was not surprised she had climbed the hill to see it.

"That ain't why I climbed it. Why for should I? I seen it a thousand times. I be'n holed up here ever since Dad moved from Kaintucky eight years ago come Christmas."

"Naturally you're sometimes tired of it. Folks like a change."

"It don't make any differ what I like, seeing as I cayn't have my ruthers." Her words came to him over her shoulder with such an echo of sadness that he was moved to say cheerily, "Sometimes when Old Man Hard Luck presses a fellow it helps

a heap to take him by the windpipe and jar things loose."

"You're a man. I allow if you was a girl and fixed like I am—" The conclusion he was permitted to guess.

"I notice girls get their way too when they set their minds to it. I expect your father would let you go out a-visiting if he knew you hankered after it."

"Wait till you meet Dad," she said, with her slow, scornful laugh. "And where would I visit anyhow?"

He knew of course that he had touched only the fringe of her trouble. The sickness of her heart was deeper than a mere desire for change. But he did not know that stranger as he was — perhaps because he *was* a stranger — she had let him glimpse the passion of resentment burning in her as she had never before done to any human being. For the child had lived a lonely life. Women were few and far scattered in the Park. She had been brought up to see only men, and men who lived in an atmosphere of furtive whispers. If the fibre of her soul had been less fine her environment would have moulded her to its type; but she had always hated it, always thrust it passionately from her. There was a certain pure nobility even in the wild bitterness which was the form of expression her rebellion took.

They covered the remainder of the descent in silence. The girl walked lightly and strongly, and Norris guessed there were tough muscles under the white satin skin. He was a man educated only in the rough school of life, which holds open session twelve months in the year, but he knew she had a vibrant voice with sensitive inflections that refined even her uncouth speech, and a grace of bearing possible only to one of her nymphlike proportions.

At the stable she turned. "I'll take keer of your horse. You'll find yore brother in the front room with Dad."

He did not tell her that back in civilization young ladies were not accustomed to wait on the horses of chance travelers, since he had no desire to flush again her white cheeks with mortification. But he unsaddled, fed, and watered under her direction before taking the path to the house with her.

"You'll be keerful not to mad Jed. He's dangerous when he's in liquor, and I don't know whether or not he is to-night," she cautioned timidly.

Phil Norris laughed. "I didn't bring any soothing syrup with me. I came up to talk over a family matter with him. If he don't like it he needn't."

"How long since you seen him last?" she abruptly asked.

"About six years."

"You'll find him changed. He's had the say-so in Lone Cone for four years and he don't brook interference."

"I know him, Miss McKinstra," said the younger brother, grimly. He always crowed loud, and was cock o' the walk when he dared be."

Her swift, shy glance swept him, appreciated the clean-cut, tightly clamped jaw, the quality of dominance that trod in his easy stride, that gleamed from his quiet gray eye. Perhaps after all she need not fear for this young man, whose smile up there on the hilltop had looked so boyish. Yet as her troubled gaze met his she knew that her heart was beating strangely fast.

Next moment she was opening for him the front door leading into the living-room. Two men sat at a table before the open fire. One of them was a gaunt, grizzled Kentucky mountaineer with beady eyes and a thin, crafty face, which one of his lean hands continually rubbed. His companion began to laugh when he caught sight of the girl, but the sound of his laughter was not pleasant.

"Thought you'd run away, did you, when —"

The words died on his lips. His gaze had found the young man behind her and fastened upon him.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, roughly.

"I came up to see you on business."

"I ain't got any business with you."

"I have some with you."

"Then you better unload it and git."

Jed Norris rose threateningly. He was a large, heavy-set man with fierce, bushy eyebrows and a long drooping mustache. A revolver rested in the scabbard that was strapped to his belt.

The younger brother was not in the least awed, but he had reasons for taking the bully of Lone Cone at his words. From the first mention of his name by Nell McKinstra he had suspected that Jed was an unwelcome suitor for her hand. He was

sure of it now, and that McKinstra was backing his pretensions. To expose him before both the girl and her father fell pat with his impulse.

"Just as you say," he answered, quietly. "I have come to ask you to do something for your wife and children. Perhaps you don't know that Jennie is taking in washing. Folks say you've done well up here. I don't ask you *how*. I only tell you that your children are in want."

"You lie. I've got no wife," the man burst forth in a fury.

"Technically you have none. She got a divorce from you because you were such a scoundrel. Let that go. You have two children. What are you going to do for them?"

"Did *she* send you here to ask me that?"

"No."

"Just took it on yourself to butt in?"

"If you want to put it that way."

"Damn you, git out before I do you a mischief," roared Jed, beside himself with anger.

But Phil's steady, gray eyes were fixed on him without faltering.

"You needn't storm. I *know* you. You're going to hear me out. Understand?"

"Then git through with it quick," the man cried, gnashing his teeth in an impotent passion of rage.

This was not the first time they had clashed, and in their battles both as boys and men the younger had always been the victor.

"I want to know first whether you refuse to do anything for your family."

"They ain't my family," the man answered sullenly, putting a curb on himself. "She went to the law to help her out and she ain't got any claim on me. I won't lift a hand for her."

"Good. That clears the way for what I've got to say. Father died two months ago and in his will cut you off without a penny. The share that would have been yours goes to your two children. I want you to know that I was with him just before he made his will. He talked it all over with me, and it was at my suggestion he passed you over for the sake of the kids."

"And you came up here to tell me that?"

Jed rose slowly from the seat into which he had flung himself. He was adrift in the storm of his passionate hatred.

"I came to have a look at you. I wanted to justify myself by seeing again how worthless you are. Now I'm satisfied."

"But I'm not."

Jed's pistol came from its scabbard with a leap, but before he could aim it the girl was hanging to his arm with her whole supple strength. He was still entangled in her hold when McKinstra's hand closed on his wrist.

"Don't be a fool, Jed. This hyer hain't a case for a gun play," he counseled, sharply.

"Let me go. You heard what he said. Let me go, I say," cried the infuriated man.

Phil had sprung forward as soon as the girl's danger flashed across his brain. He wrenched the weapon from his struggling brother's hand and with the other arm gently swept Nell back. His blood was racing with the joy of her. She had saved his life. This splendid creature who stood panting against the wall, tall, white-throated, full-bosomed, had risked herself for him. He exulted in the knowledge even while his cool eyes watched his brother succumbing to the grip of the loose-hung, powerful Kentuckian.

Nell herself had already forgotten it. She faced her father with a pulse of anger beating in her throat.

"Did you know this, Dad — that he was married already and has a family?" she demanded, fiercely.

A look hot from stormy eyes fell into his cool, amused ones.

"Hold yore hawsses, honey. Didn't you hear he's got a divorce?"

"And you never told me. You kept it from me and let him come a-co'tin' me."

"That's my business, and you better not make it yore'n lessen you want yore back skinned with a hickory," he answered, amiably.

She looked at him with deep anguish in her white face, then with a sob turned and left the room.

"You better light a shuck, young fellow. You done enough mischief for one day," said McKinstra to his uninvited guest.

"If I've saved her from Jed Norris I've done a good day's work," the young man answered.

"Don't gamble on it, because you hain't," returned the Kentuckian dryly.

Phil told him in crisp, curt sentences what he thought of a father so dead to his daughter's feelings. McKinstra heard him out before he stepped to a rack and lifted down a rifle.

"Yore mighty high-heeled, young fellow, but no man on top o' the yearth kin talk that-a-way to Dave McKinstra. Git out of my house or I'll blow yore head off, drawled the mountaineer, his beady eyes fixed steadily on the young man.

"All right. I'm through with what I came to say." Norris looked steadily down the rifle barrel into the shining black eyes to show that the fear of death was not upon him before he opened the door and stepped into the night.

Phil saddled reluctantly in the moonlight. He had a hope and half an expectation that he might see the girl again before he went. He could do no good by staying, and yet it seemed like a desertion for him to leave her alone to fight such unequal odds. His hope was not justified, and he took the trail into the hills with a heavy heart. If he might only have had another word with her so that he could have let her know she had a friend to call upon.

The ranch lay three hundred feet below him before he stopped his pony for a breathing spell. Looking down into the crystal clear valley he debated whether to go back. Surely she needed help if ever a woman did. How could her innocence cope with the pressure that would be brought to bear upon her?

While he still hesitated she stood before him. From behind the rock where he had got his first glimpse of her she came, leading a pony by the bridle.

"You stare like you think I air a ha'nt. I'm only McKinstra's Nell. You ain't got shet of our tribe yet," she said.

"And it really is you, Miss McKinstra?"

She did not notice how his voice leaped with joy.

"'Twas what youall said nerved me to it," she cried. "What youall said 'bout fighting yore luck. I cayn't fight mine. I

reckon girls ain't made for fighting. All I c'n do is run away. If I knew where!"

She gulped out her conclusion miserably and hid her head in the mane of her pony. Phil slipped from his saddle, trailed the rein, and went across to her. He put his arm round her shoulders and tried to comfort her.

"Don't you cry, Nell. Don't you. I'm standing your partner in this play. It's all coming out right. Don't you take on so, little girl."

When she could make herself articulate for the sobs that shook her it was to cry softly in broken phrases:

"I ain't got ary friends outside. Youall air the only decent folks I know. And it ain't noways fittin' I should trouble you, me being a girl."

His masculine density appeared to miss the point of her maidenly shame.

"Trouble! Why, honey! you saved my life half an hour ago. I'm tickled to death to do anything for you I can. You got a claim on me that calls for all that's in me. Don't you ever forget that."

"I ain't ever had a mother. My mammy died before I could walk. Dad got run out of Kaintucky by the revenue officers and come hyer. There ain't any neighbor women nearer'n seventeen miles and none of them would darst help me."

"You come with me," he said, stoutly. "I'll take you to an old lady that will love you like her own chick. She'll ce'tainly be mighty pleased to have you staying with her."

"I've always knowed about the goings on in Lost Cañon. Nights I would wake up when I was a little trick and hear horses galloping. Sometimes I'd hear voices and cattle bellowing. I knowed even then what it meant — rustling and all kinds of mean doings, with Dad in the thick of it. I hated it all like p'ison, but all I could do was bury my head in the pillow and cry."

He stroked her dark hair softly. "You poor little girl."

"But it's been different sence Jed come to see me for settings up. 'Fore that Dad was right good to me, but now 'pears like he's all possessed to have me marry Jed. I cayn't trust him. He didn't tell me 'bout Jed's wife and children. Lost Cañon